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The local planning process was used as a management option for two reasons. First, CAMA has already established a strategy for state and local cooperation to manage coastal resources, including public trust waters. The Act requires local governments within the 20-county coastal area to develop their own land use plans in accordance with state guidelines.

To date, CAMA mandated plans have only addressed land uses even though the jurisdictional boundaries of several counties encompass large areas of coastal water and there is no prohibition forbidding the planning process from including public trust waters. CAMA clearly states that the management of water areas is important in achieving the balanced use and preservation of coastal resources. GS 113A-102.

Second, over the last few years local governments have been playing a greater role in the management of natural resources. There has been a shift from a strong state role with restricted local involvement in the management of natural resources to a more open situation with greater local involvement (Liner 1985).

This trend is likely to continue with the recognition that many environmental problems are caused by activities (such as land use) that are normally regulated by local government. The alternative would be for the state to assume powers that have traditionally been the province of local government, an action that would likely injure state and local relations.

Several benefits are derived from using comprehensive planning as a management option. First, expanding land use planning to cover aquatic areas provides a wholistic view of the land and water interface—a view that can consider inter-relationships between functional (jurisdictional) and natural systems. Too often, management strategies are built around jurisdictional considerations without integrating the natural systems for which the strategy is intended to protect or enhance.

A comprehensive planning strategy can provide predictability for users of the state's public trust waters and adjacent shoreline. This predictability is important for all users. For example, environmentalists generally want a long-term commitment to protection of the estuary and public trust waters while developers want to know what development is possible before they make major investments.

Comprehensive plans can act as a collecting point for all existing federal, state and local law, regulations and policies. A frequent criticism of management programs is that they are often disjointed and confusing, making it difficult for resource users to determine their legal responsibilities. A properly structured water use plan could alleviate some of this confusion.

Finally, plans can act as collecting points for new research information. One of the objectives of the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study is the development of an effective management structure that would have the ability to accommodate new information.

A Summary of This Report

The first chapter of this report is a discussion of the current laws and regulations that impact the resources and uses of Carteret County's public trust waters. This is important because local plans must be consistent with state and federal requirements. Existing laws and regulations must be viewed as the minimum foundation on which local water use plans and accompanying ordinances are built. Understanding the law enables planners and policy-makers to know when and where it is appropriate for local governments to manage natural resources.